

## OBITUARY

CHARLES McCANN, 1899-1980

(*With a plate*)

Yule Mervyn Charles McCann was born at Castle Rock, Goa Frontier, on 4th December 1899.

Educated at St. Mary's High School, Mazagon, he worked and studied for some time at St. Xavier's College, Bombay, under Fr. E. Blatter, S.J., the eminent botanist. He served as a laboratory assistant and general factotum in the biological laboratory and was curator of the college museum. During this period (1916-1920) he carried out research in systematic botany both independently and as a probationer under Fr. Blatter. Then he left the college and worked with the Bombay City Police for about a year. In 1921 he joined the Bombay Natural History Society as a field collector for the Mammal Survey in the Palni Hills and later in the Indus Delta, and soon became its Assistant Curator.

At that time the Society's staff was working on the construction of the Natural History galleries of the Prince of Wales Museum of Western India and McCann played no small part in the collecting, skinning, modelling and preparation of the group cases which though now sadly jaded and somewhat out of date, were then considered among the finest exhibits of their kind in the world.

The following passage from a published note about himself and his place of birth is very real:

"Some of the grandest tropical forest surrounded the area and the fauna abounded with wildlife, from elephants to flies, so much so that doors had to be closed at sundown for fear of dangerous intruders—even the King Cobra, though rare, occurred in the area. Such an environment seems to have influenced my future as a student of nature! (?) My parents

informed me that I was the bane of their existence for I froze on to everything that moved. All attempts at shaping my ends had no avail. From "misdirected" babyhood onwards the "kink" increased out of all proportion (according to some, I was just daft!)"

Charles McCann was a boon companion on any natural history trip—irrespective of whether you were chasing tiger or butterflies—one of the great advantages of his company was the apparent delight he took in repairing flat tyres, skinning birds and in fact doing all the donkey work of the trip while at the same time keeping his eyes, ears and hands open for all items of natural history interest.

From 1932 to 1947 he was one of the editors of the Society's journal to which he has contributed perhaps 200 notes and papers covering a most extraordinary range of subjects, from taxonomic botany to bats, birds, snakes, lizards, tortoises, frogs and a variety of insects. A short, but representative list of his publications is appended.

At the time of Independence, the uncertainty of the future for foreigners and Anglo-Indians in India, prompted him to resign from his post and migrate to New Zealand, a step which he regretted as all his letters showed.

When he resigned in 1946, the Executive Committee of the Bombay Natural History Society recorded its appreciation of his services, and the relative minute reads in part:

"The merit of his scientific work is evidenced in his many biological contributions to the journal of the Society. He is one of the outstanding botanists in India and his monograph on Grasses, which he wrote jointly with the late Fr. Blatter and which was published under the aegis of the Imperial Council of



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